

# WORD STRESS PATTERN IN ENGLISH WORDS

**Word stress** and **syllables** are the next important things to learn about English pronunciation and accent.

## **Syllables**

A syllable is a word, or part of a word, which contains a single vowel sound. It is a single unit of speech.

Each word contains one syllable, or more.

## **1 Syllable**

Here are examples of words with a single syllable:

**pen, man, pig, cup, hat**

In English, a vowel sound can be made of more than one vowel letter. So the following words have a single syllable as well:

**feet, moon, cake, have, break, bought**

All of these words contain only one vowel sound, and therefore a single syllable.

## 2 Syllables

A word can have more than one syllable. The following words are examples of words with two syllables. Here are examples of words with 2 syllables. The different syllables are shown on the right, and they are separated with a space.

garden: **gar-den**

hotel: **ho-tel**

consist: **con-sist**

object: **ob-ject**

focus: **fo-cus**

### **3 Syllables**

Examples of words with three syllables:

September: **sep-tem-ber**

department: **de-part-ment**

telephone: **te-le-phone**

camera: **ca-mer-a**

Saturday: **sa-tur-day**

hamburger: **ham-bur-ger**

vitamin: **vi-ta-min**

## 4 Syllables

Examples of words with four syllables:

kindergarten: **kin-der-gar-ten**

information: **in-for-ma-tion**

January: **ja-nu-ar-y**

American: **A-mer-i-can**

discovery: **di-sco-ver-y**

That is not all, of course. There can be words with even more syllables. But you get the point, right?

**What is Word Stress?**



In many languages such as in English, all the syllables in multisyllabic words are not equally stressed (spoken with some kind of a force or strength) when they are pronounced. WORD-STRESS is also sometimes referred to as WORD ACCENT.

In English, we do not say each syllable with the same force or strength. This means that one part of a certain word is said louder and longer than other parts of the same word. In one word, we accentuate ONE syllable. We say **one** syllable very **loudly** (big, strong, important) and **all the other syllables** very **quietly**.

The syllable which is pronounced with greater force is called the **stressed syllable**. You can also call it the **accented syllable**. "Accent" in this case means "**emphasis**".

**English has its typical WORD-STRESS pattern.**

It is something that is completely natural for English speakers, but something ESL students can learn from practicing their conversational skills and by learning the rules for using word stress.

When speaking, it is important to put the stress on the correct syllable. Otherwise, it would sound unnatural, and might even be difficult to understand!

Watch the following video for a full explanation and demonstration of word stress:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX1rrFh4OZw>

Now, have you read all the explanations and watched the video? Very good!

Here are some examples of the word stress of some common words (the stressed part is in **bold**):

water: **wa**-ter

people: **peo**-ple

television: **tel**-e-vi-sion

together: to-**geth**-er

potato: po-**ta**-to

before: be-**fore**

begin: be-**gin**

## **A few things to remember:**

- 1. A word can only have one stress.** In a very long word you can have a secondary stress but it is always a much smaller stress.
- 2. Only vowels are stressed, not consonants.** The vowels in English are a, e, i, o, and u. The consonants are all the other letters.

You are almost ready to move on to the next lesson, but before that, make sure you know the answers to the following questions:

What is a syllable?

What is a stressed syllable/accented syllable?

How can you know where to put the stress for each word while speaking?

Have you answered the questions? Awesome!

Read for Rules of Word Stress in English at:

<https://www.englishclub.com/pronunciation/word-stress-2.htm>

For Phonetics, Pronunciation practice, word stress visit:

<http://www.englishmedialab.com/pronunciation/pronunciation%202.htm>

## Word stress rules

1. Two-Syllable **nouns** and **adjectives**

2. Two-Syllable **verbs** and **prepositions**

3. Three-Syllable words

4. Words ending in **er, or, ly**

5. Words ending in **consonants** and in **y**

6. Words with various endings

7. Words ending in **ee, ese, ique, ette**

8. Prefixes

9. Stress on the **second from the end** syllable

10. Stress on the **third from end** syllable

11. Word stress for **compound** words

12. Phrasal verbs

13. Proper nouns

14. Reflexive pronouns

15. Numbers

## 1. Two-Syllable nouns and adjectives

In most two syllable **nouns** and **adjectives**, the first syllable takes on the stress.

### **Examples:**

SAM-ples

CAR-ton

Col-or-ful

RAI-ny



## 2. Two-Syllable verbs and prepositions

In most two syllable **verbs** and **prepositions**, the stress is on the second syllable.

### Examples:

re-LAX

Re-CEIVE

di-RECT

a-MONG

### More about word stress on two-syllable words

About 80% or so of two-syllable words get their stress on the first syllable.

There are of course, exceptions to this rule, but very few nouns and adjectives get stress on their second syllable.

Verbs and prepositions usually get stress placed on the second syllable, but there are exceptions to this too.

a-SIDE

be-TWEEN

### 3. Three-Syllable words

For three syllable words, look at the word ending (the suffix), using the following as your guide.

### 4. Words ending in er, or, ly

For words ending with the suffixes **er**, **or**, or **ly**, the stress is placed on the first syllable.

#### Examples:

DI-Rect/DI-rec-tor

OR-der/OR-der-ly

MA-nage/MA-nag-er

### 5. Words ending in consonants and in y

If there is a word that ends in a **consonant** or in a **y**, then the first syllable gets the stress.

#### Examples:

RA-ri-ty

OP-ti-mal

GRA-di-entl

CON-tain-erl

## 6. Words with various endings

Take a good look at the list of suffixes below (suffixes are word endings).

Your stress is going to come on the syllable right before the suffix. This applies to words of all syllable lengths.

### Examples:

**able:** ADDable, ARable, DURable

**ary:** PRIMary, DIary, liBRary

**cial:** juDIcial, nonSOcial

**cian:** muSIcian, phySIcian, cliNICian

**ery:** BAKery, SCENery

**graphy:** calLIgraphy, bibliOgraphy, stenOgraphy

**ial:** celesTial, iniTial, juDICIAL

**ian:** coMEDian, ciVILian, techNICian

**ible:** viSIble, terRIble, reSIstible

**ic:** arCHAic, plaTONic, synTHETic

**ical:** MAGical, LOGical, CRITICAL

**ics:** diaBETics, paediATRics

**ion:** classifiCATION, repoSItion, vegeTATION

**ity:** imMUunity, GRAVity, VANity

**ium:** HElium, ALUminum, PREmium

**imum:** MInimum, MAXimum, OPTimum

**logy:** Blology, CARdiology, RAdiology

**tal:** caPItal, biCOAStal, reCItal

## 7. Words ending in **ee**, **ese**, **ique**, **ette**

Words that use the suffix **ee**, **ese**, **eer**, **ique** or **ette**, have the primary stress actually placed on the suffix.

This applies to words of all syllable lengths.

### **Examples:**

**ee:** agr**EE**, jambor**EE**, guarant**EE**

**eer:** sights**EER**, puppet**EER**

**ese:** Siam**ESE**, Japan**ESE**, che**ESE**

**ette:** cass**ETTE**, Corv**ETTE**, towel**ETTE**

**ique:** un**I**QUE, phys**I**QUE

## 8. Prefixes

Usually, prefixes do not take the stress of a word.

There are a few exceptions to this rule, however, like: **un**, **in**, **pre**, **ex** and **mis**, which are all stressed in their prefix.

### Examples:

**ex:** e-XAM-ple, ex-pla-NAtion, e-XAM-ine

**in:** IN-side, IN-efficient, IN-terest

**mis:** MIS-spoke, MI-stake, MIS-spelled

**pre:** PRE-cede, PRE-ar-range, PRE-li-min-ary

## 9. Stress on the second from the end syllable

You put stress on the second syllable from the end of the word, with words ending in **ic**, **sion** and **tion**.

### Examples:

i-CON-ic

Hy-per-TEN-sion

Nu-TRI-tion

## 10. Stress on the third from end syllable

You put stress on the third from end syllable with words that end in **cy**, **ty**, **phy**, **gy** and **al**.

### Examples:

de-mo-CRA-cy

TREA-ty

Ge-O-graphy

AL-ler-gy

NAU-ti-cal

## **11. Word stress for compound words**

### **A. Compound noun**

A compound noun is a noun made out of two nouns in order to form one word. In a compound noun, the first word usually takes on the stress.

#### **Examples:**

SEA-food

ICE-land

TOOTH-paste

### **B. Compound adjectives**

A compound adjective is an adjective composed of at least two words.

Often, hyphens are used in compound adjectives. In compound adjectives, the stress is placed within the second word.

#### **Examples:**

ten-ME-ter

rock-SO-lid

Fif-teen-MI-nute

### **C. Compound verbs**

A compound verb is when a subject has two or more verbs. The stress is on the second or on the last part.

#### **Examples:**

Matilda loves bread but de-TESTS butter.

Sarah baked cookies and ATE them up.

Dogs love to eat bones and love DRIN-king water.

### **D. Noun + compound nouns**

Noun + compound Nouns are two word compound nouns. In noun + compound noun, the stress is on the first word.

#### **Examples:**

AIR-plane mechanic

PRO-ject manager

BOARD-room member



## **12. Phrasal verbs**

Phrasal verbs are words made from a verb and preposition.

In phrasal verbs, the second word gets the stress (the preposition).

### **Examples:**

Black OUT

break DOWN

look OUT

## **13. Proper nouns**

Proper nouns are specific names of people, places or things. For example: Jeniffer, Spain, Google.

The second word is always the one that takes the stress

### **Examples:**

North DAKOTA

Mr. SMITH

Apple INCORPORATED

## 14. Reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns show that the action affects the person who performs the action. For example: I hit myself.

The second syllable usually takes the stress.

### Examples:

my-SELF

Them-SELVES

Our-SELVES

## 15. Numbers

If the number is a multiple of ten, the stress is placed on the first syllable.

### Examples:

TEN

FIF-ty

ONE-hundred

## **Word stress and dictionaries**

Another great tip for beginning English learners is to grab a dictionary.

Dictionaries are great tools for learning word stress.

For every word, the dictionary indicates where the stress goes, for example by placing an apostrophe before the stress.

Animation: ani'meɪʃ(ə)n/

Take a look at your dictionary to find out how your dictionary indicates word stress.

Well done! You have completed the Word  
Stress and Syllables lesson.